

The Fiddler's Friend

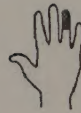
Forty Fiddle Exercises
to Improve
Fingering
and
Bowing

Randy Miller

FIDDLECASE BOOKS™

Error in 1st Printing

The hand emphasis in #1 Abacus Major
and #2 Abacus Major Slurred should be:



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FORTY FIDDLE EXERCISES
TO IMPROVE
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BY RANDY MILLER

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Preface

Why a book of fiddle exercises? Well, although published exercises for the school of classical violin abound, almost nothing exists for the type of playing associated with traditional fiddle music. Any fiddler intent on improving his or her playing with more supple fingering and greater fluency in bowing has had few resources to turn to for help. The writing of these forty exercises grew out of a need to help my fiddle students, as well as a desire to improve my own playing.

Practice need not be a grim chore. By breaking down the musical elements of fiddling to its bowing-and-fingering basics, and working out a system of repetitive, focused practice on these basics, there is tremendous potential for progress from novice to expert. This is true of any activity requiring eye-hand coordination such as keyboarding, shuffling a deck of cards, juggling, riding a unicycle, etc. Repeating basic patterns is the key. And if you can delight in doing something over and over, because it means you are getting better and better at *what you like to do*, then practice can be an enjoyable vehicle for producing great playing.

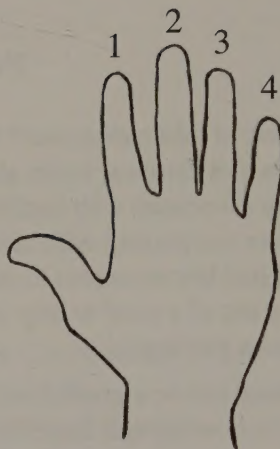
The fingering of the left hand can be a great challenge, since most fiddlers are right-handed. Many of these exercises, therefore, focus on strengthening the left hand, and in particular the weak 3rd and 4th fingers. Cross-bowing (slurred bowing between two strings) is also a challenge—for the bowing arm—and there are exercises to work on this aspect of fiddling.

A word of advice: to get the most benefit from playing these exercises, it is strongly recommended that the bowing marks, accidentals, and finger numbers be followed exactly as written. The exercises have been created with typical fingering and bowing patterns in mind, ones encountered in many fiddle tunes. I believe these exercises will prove beneficial whatever the style played, from New England, Cape Breton, and Irish, to old-time and bluegrass.

An old saw, not without merit, goes, "Practice makes perfect." But focusing on exercises tailored for the fiddle also means that "Practice makes perfect sense."

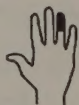
—Randy Miller

The illustration to the right shows the numbers assigned to the fingers of the left hand. In the exercises, a number appearing over a note indicates that note is to be played by the corresponding finger. The marking “o” over a note shows that the note is to be played on the open string.



Tempo markings, given at the upper left of each exercise, are meant to provide a starting point. The tempo is deliberately slow, to allow for learning the notes and the bowing pattern. A good approach after learning the exercise is to repeat it several times, increasing the tempo each time through. Gradually increasing the speed maximizes the potential for improvement.

The book is loosely arranged by degree of difficulty, with harder exercises given towards the back. Some exercises work to strengthen a particular finger (or fingers), in which case a small illustration has been added to indicate the finger:



*Here, emphasis is on
the 3rd finger*

Where an exercise emphasizes work on a bowing pattern, a small picture of the frog-end of a bow is given:



Bowing work is emphasized

Finally, a downstroke on the bow is indicated by the symbol ▢. An upstroke on the bow is indicated by √.

Play any exercise first at a slow tempo. Repeat several times, increasing the speed each time. To work on a particular finger or to focus on bowing, select an exercise from the list below.

1st Finger

- 15. Ivory
- 23. Mackerel—III
- 40. Woolly Bear

2nd Finger

- 7. Dublin'
- 11. Galaxy Major—I
- 13. Hornets
- 14. Hornets Slurred
- 19. Kangaroo
- 23. Mackerel—III
- 24. Nimble Minor—I
- 26. Obsidian Major
- 27. Obsidian Minor
- 28. Pendulum
- 29. Pendulum Slurred
- 31. Roll on the 2nd Finger
- 32. Roll on the 3rd Finger
- 33. Skip-a-Note in A
- 34. Skip-a-Note in D
- 35. Skip-a-Note in G
- 37. Undertow
- 38. Undertow Slurred

3rd Finger

- 1. Abacus Major
- 2. Abacus Major Slurred
- 3. Abacus Minor
- 4. Abacus Minor Slurred
- 8. Ermine
- 9. Ermine Slurred
- 13. Hornets
- 14. Hornets Slurred

3rd Finger, cont.

- 17. Jack Frost—II
- 18. Jack Frost—III
- 19. Kangaroo
- 20. Lilies
- 25. Nimble Minor—II
- 26. Obsidian Major
- 27. Obsidian Minor
- 28. Pendulum
- 29. Pendulum Slurred
- 30. Roll on the 1st Finger
- 31. Roll on the 2nd Finger
- 32. Roll on the 3rd Finger
- 33. Skip-a-Note in A
- 34. Skip-a-Note in D
- 35. Skip-a-Note in G
- 36. Terrapin
- 37. Undertow
- 38. Undertow Slurred
- 40. Woolly Bear

4th Finger

- 1. Abacus Major
- 2. Abacus Major Slurred
- 3. Abacus Minor
- 4. Abacus Minor Slurred
- 7. Dublin'
- 8. Ermine
- 9. Ermine Slurred
- 12. Galaxy Major—II
- 25. Nimble Minor—II
- 26. Obsidian Major
- 27. Obsidian Minor
- 28. Pendulum

4th Finger, cont.

- 29. Pendulum Slurred
- 32. Roll on the 3rd Finger
- 36. Terrapin
- 37. Undertow
- 38. Undertow Slurred

Bowing

- 2. Abacus Major Slurred
- 4. Abacus Minor Slurred
- 7. Dublin'
- 9. Ermine Slurred
- 10. Filigree
- 11. Galaxy Major—I
- 12. Galaxy Major—II
- 14. Hornets Slurred
- 15. Ivory
- 17. Jack Frost—II
- 18. Jack Frost—III
- 19. Kangaroo
- 20. Lilies
- 22. Mackerel—II
- 23. Mackerel—III
- 24. Nimble Minor—I
- 25. Nimble Minor—II
- 26. Obsidian Major
- 27. Obsidian Minor
- 29. Pendulum Slurred
- 33. Skip-a-Note in A
- 34. Skip-a-Note in D
- 35. Skip-a-Note in G
- 38. Undertow Slurred
- 39. Vireo
- 40. Woolly Bear

1. Abacus Major

Bow each note separately starting with a downstroke.



♩ = 88

Musical notation for Exercise 1: Abacus Major. It consists of two staves in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. The first staff contains four measures of eighth-note patterns. The second staff contains two measures of eighth-note patterns, ending with a repeat sign. Bowing directions are indicated by 'V' (downstroke) and 'o' (upstroke) above the notes.

2. Abacus Major Slurred

♩ = 88



Musical notation for Exercise 2: Abacus Major Slurred. It consists of two staves in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. The first staff contains four measures of eighth-note patterns. The second staff contains two measures of eighth-note patterns, ending with a repeat sign. Bowing directions are indicated by 'V' (downstroke) and 'o' (upstroke) above the notes. Slurs are placed over groups of notes in each measure.

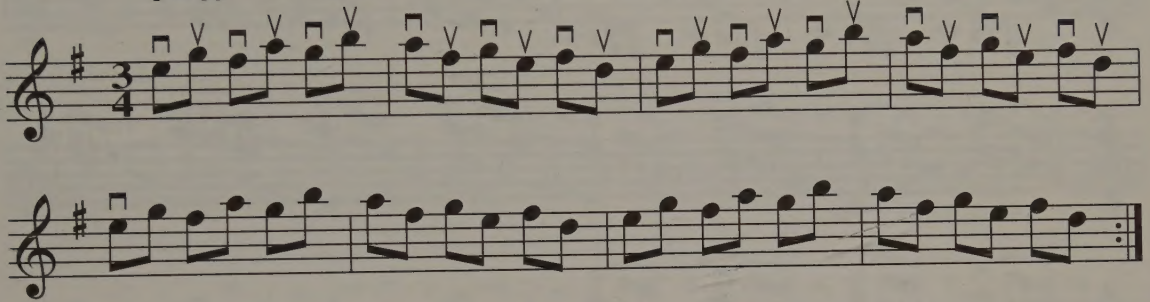
3. Abacus Minor

Bow each note separately starting with a downstroke.

Play the E notes on the open string.



$\text{♩} = 88$

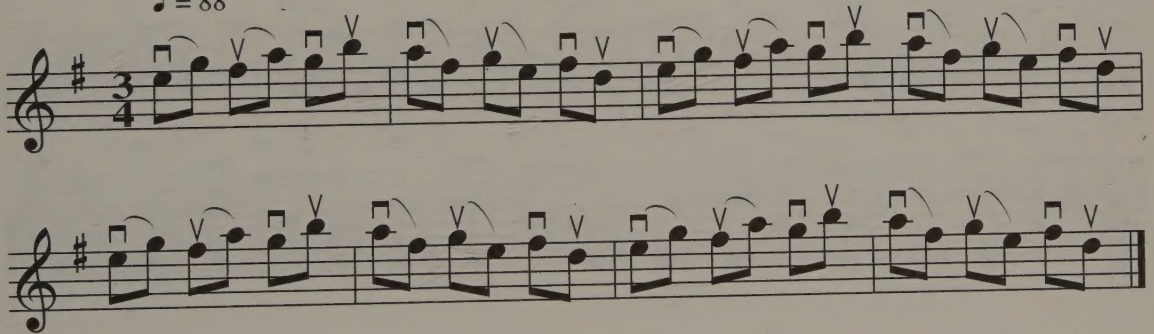


4. Abacus Minor Slurred

Play the E notes on the open string.

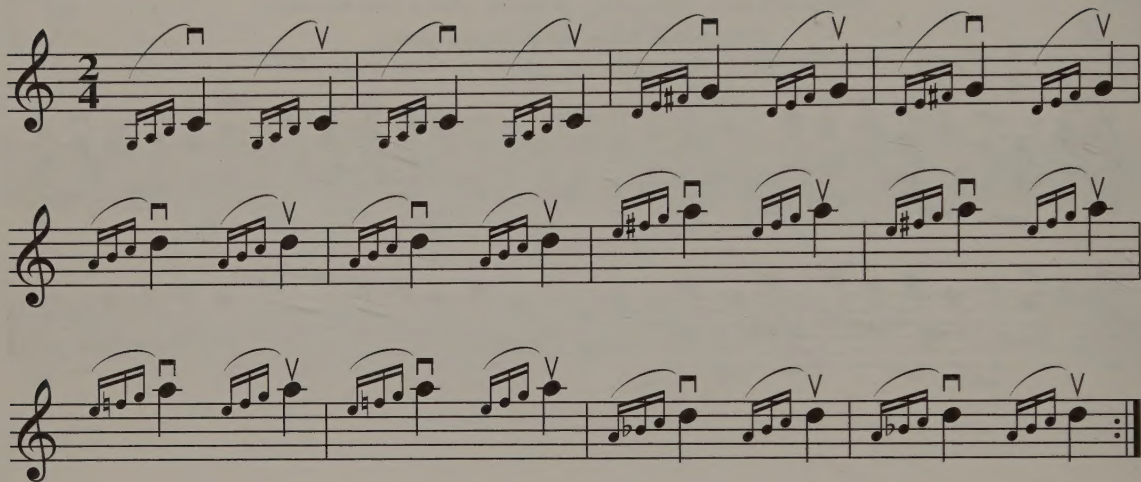


$\text{♩} = 88$



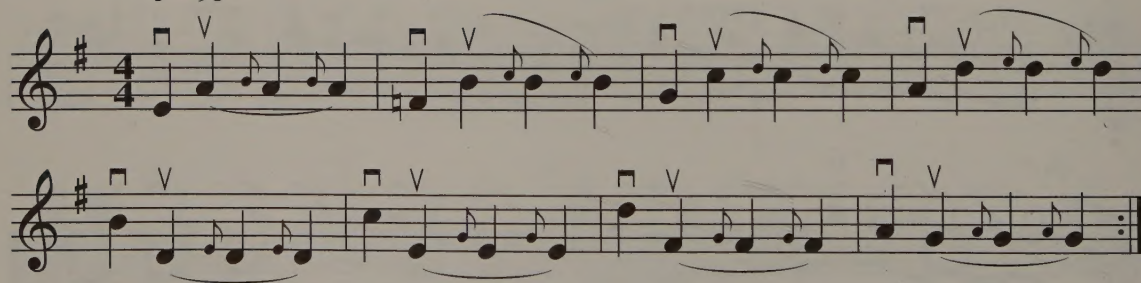
5. Boa

♩ = 70



6. Cinnamon

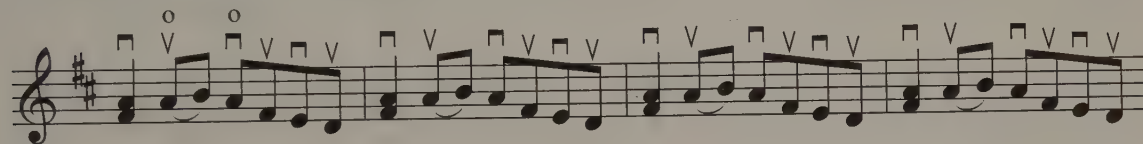
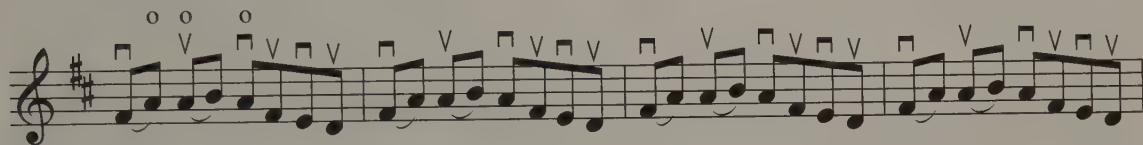
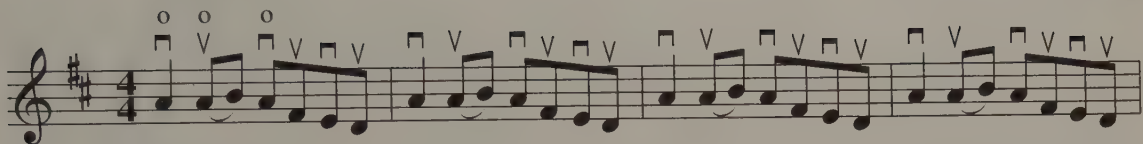
♩ = 98



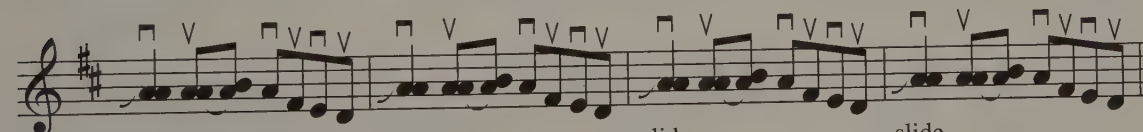
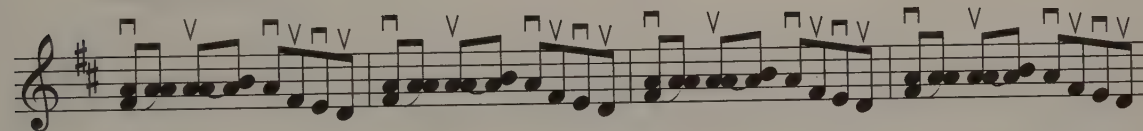
7. Dublin'



♩ = 96



double the A notes:



slide

slide

slide

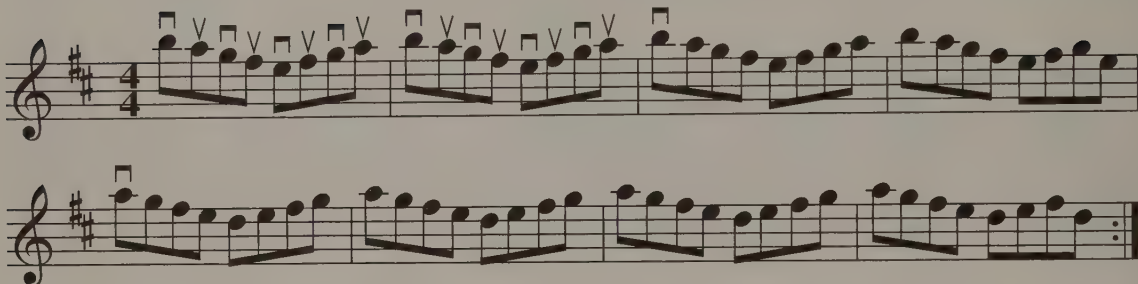
slide

8. Ermine

*Bow each note separately starting with a downstroke.
Play the E notes on the open string.*



♩ = 94



9. Ermine Slurred

Play the E notes on the open string.



♩ = 94



10. Filigree

Bow each note separately starting with a downstroke.

♩ = 84



A musical score for the piece 'Filigree' in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It consists of four staves. The first staff contains a series of eighth-note patterns, many of which are marked with a 'V' for bowing. The subsequent three staves continue the melody with various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and some rests.

11. Galaxy Major Part I

Lift each finger after playing. Bow each note separately starting with a downstroke.

♩ = 70



A musical score for the piece 'Galaxy Major Part I' in G major (one sharp) and 6/8 time. It consists of four staves. The first staff features a series of eighth-note patterns, many marked with a 'V' for bowing. The second and third staves continue the melody with various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and some rests. The fourth staff concludes the piece with a final chord.

12. Galaxy Major Part II

Lift each finger after playing. Bow each note separately starting with an upstroke.



♩ = 70

13. Hornets

Bow each note separately starting with a downstroke.



♩ = 100

14. Hornets Slurred



♩ = 100

3 2 3 2 3 1 3 3 2 3 2 3 1 3

15. Ivory



*In the first line, play the A notes on the open string.
In the second line, play the D notes on the open string.*

♩ = 88

16. Jack Frost Part I

Cuts starting with an upstroke.

$\text{♩} = 50$

17. Jack Frost Part II

Cuts starting with an upstroke.



$\text{♩} = 84$

18. Jack Frost Part III

Cuts starting with an upstroke, adding a slur.



$\text{♩} = 84$

19. Kangaroo

The more notes per bow stroke, the faster the tempo.



$\text{♩} = 90$

The musical score consists of seven staves, each containing a single melodic line. The key signature is G major (one sharp). The tempo is marked as quarter note = 90. The notation includes various rhythmic values (eighth and sixteenth notes), beams, slurs, and bowing marks (V for up-bow, O for down-bow). The music is written in treble clef and includes repeat signs at the beginning of several staves.

20. Lilies

Play the A notes on the open string.

The first line, with no fingering, is the bowing motion used in the last two lines.



♩. = 60

21. Mackerel Part I

Cuts starting with a downstroke.

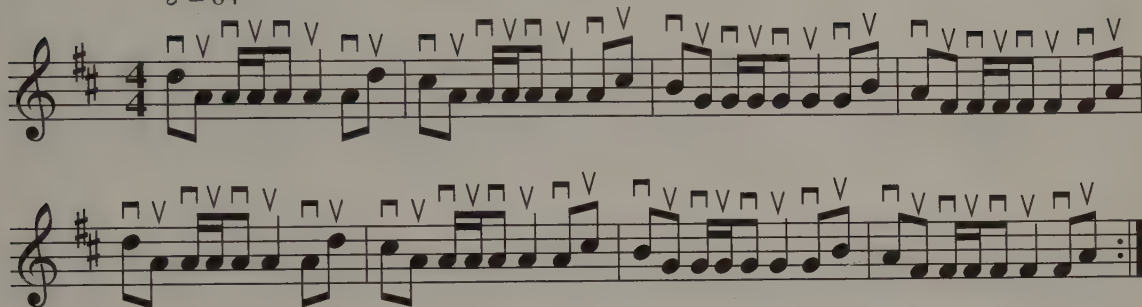
♩. = 50

22. Mackerel Part II

Cuts starting with a downstroke.



$\text{♩} = 84$

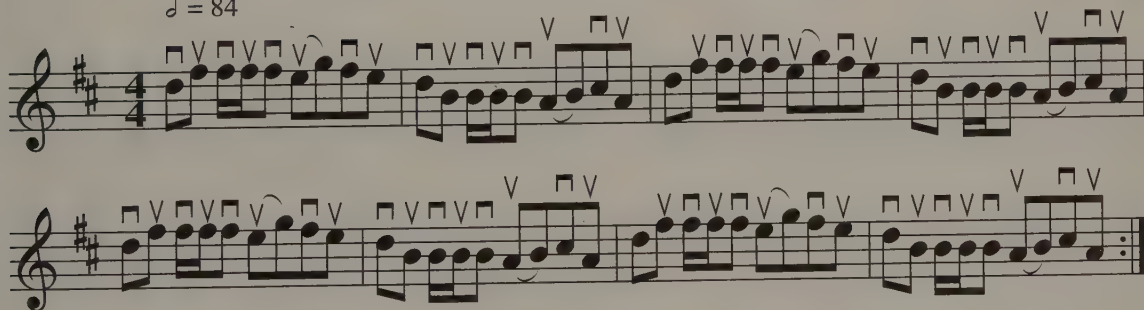


23. Mackerel Part III

Cuts starting with a downstroke, adding a slur.



$\text{♩} = 84$



24. Nimble Minor Part I

Lift each finger after playing.

Bow each note separately starting with a downstroke.



♩. = 70

25. Nimble Minor Part II

Lift each finger after playing.

Bow each note separately starting with an upstroke.



♩. = 70

26. Obsidian Major

Use open strings for the E and A notes.

$\text{♩} = 100$



27. Obsidian Minor

Use open strings for the A and D notes.

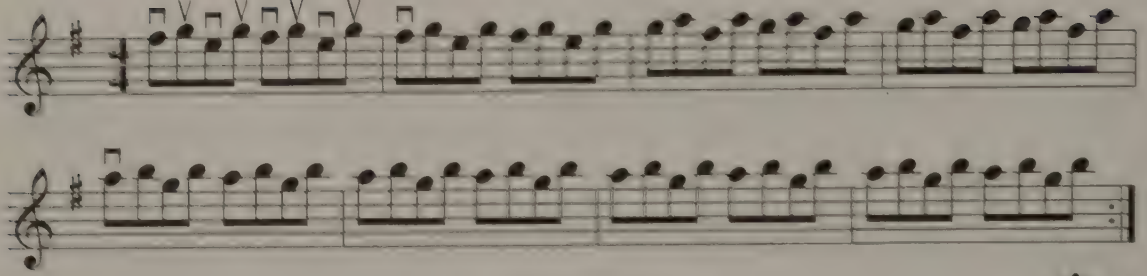
$\text{♩} = 100$



28. Pendulum

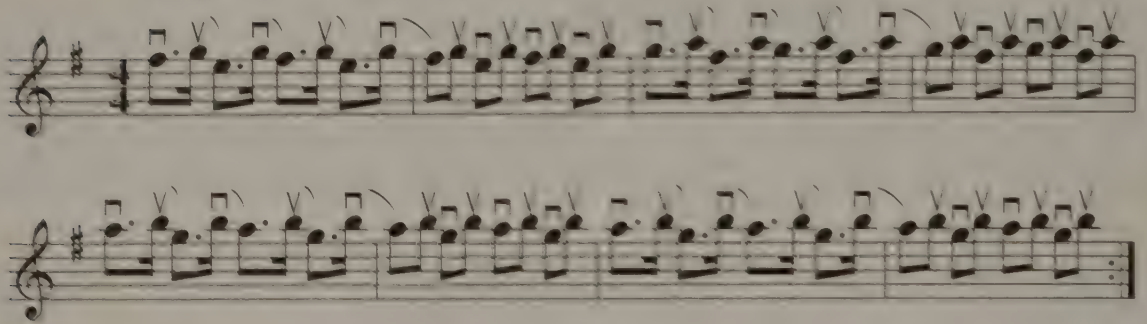
Bow each note separately starting with a downstroke.

$\text{♩} = 90$



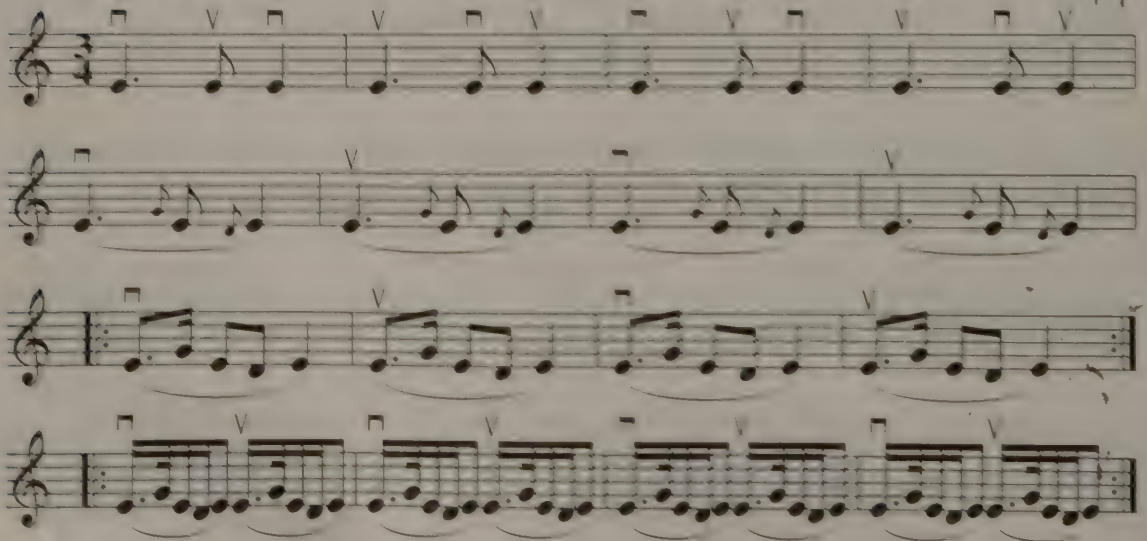
29. Pendulum Slurred

$\text{♩} = 88$



30. Roll on the 1st Finger

$\text{♩} = 88$



31. Roll on the 2nd Finger



$\text{♩} = 88$

32. Roll on the 3rd Finger



$\text{♩} = 88$

33. Skip-a-Note in A

Bow each note separately.



$\text{♩} = 80$

34. Skip-a-Note in D

Bow each note separately.



$\text{♩} = 80$

35. Skip-a-Note in G

Bow each note separately.



♩ = 80

36. Terrapin

Lift each finger after playing.

Bow each note separately starting with a downstroke.



♩ = 60

37. Undertow

Bow each note separately starting with a downstroke.



♩ = 86



38. Undertow Slurred

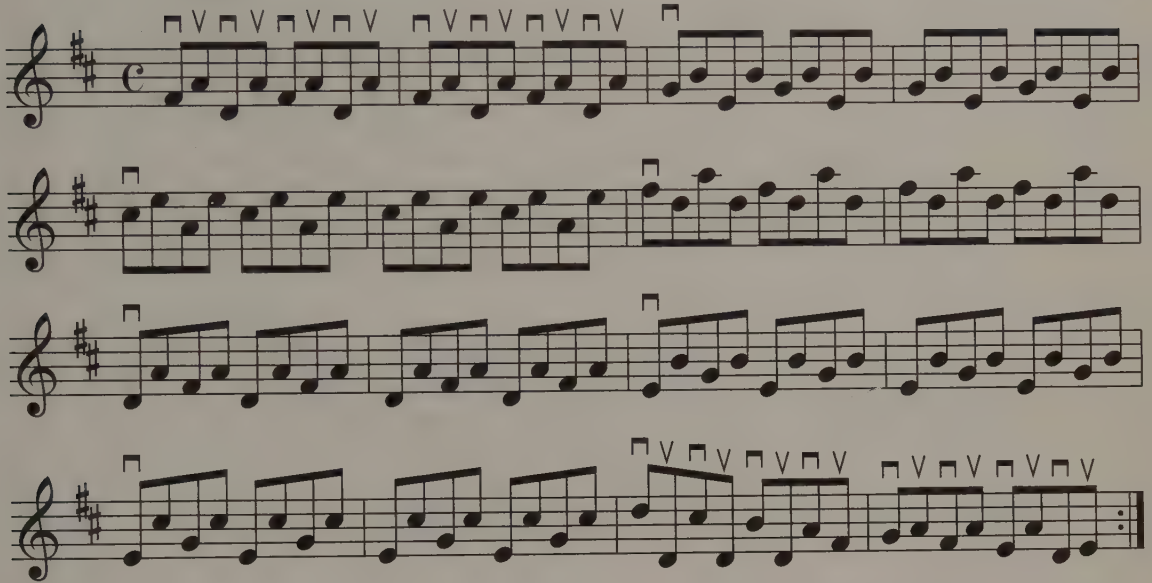
Play the E notes on the open string.



♩ = 92

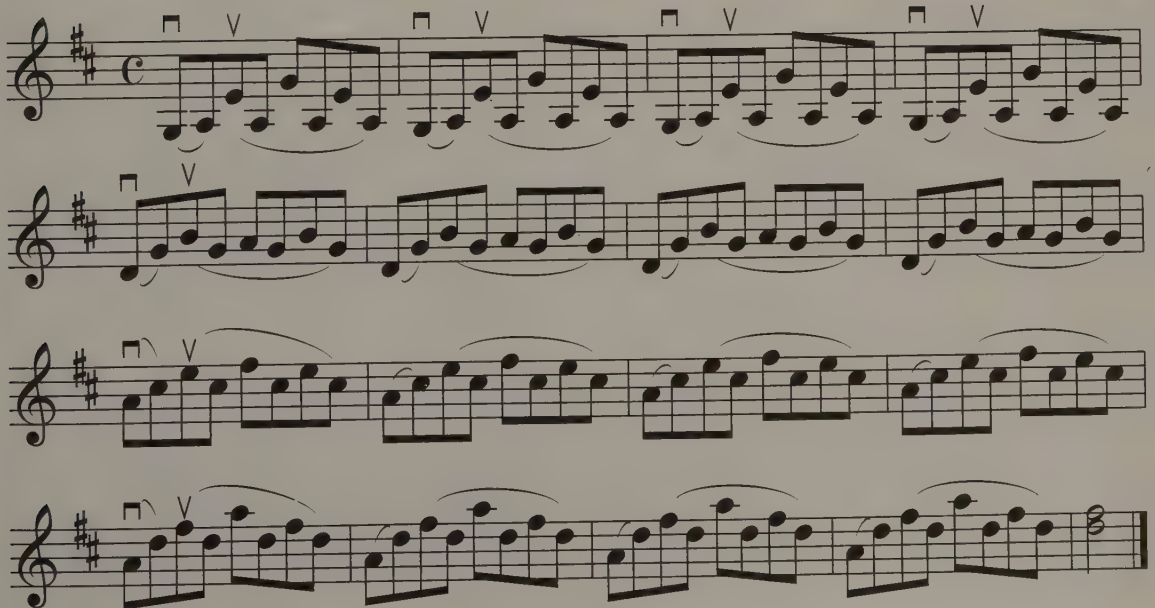


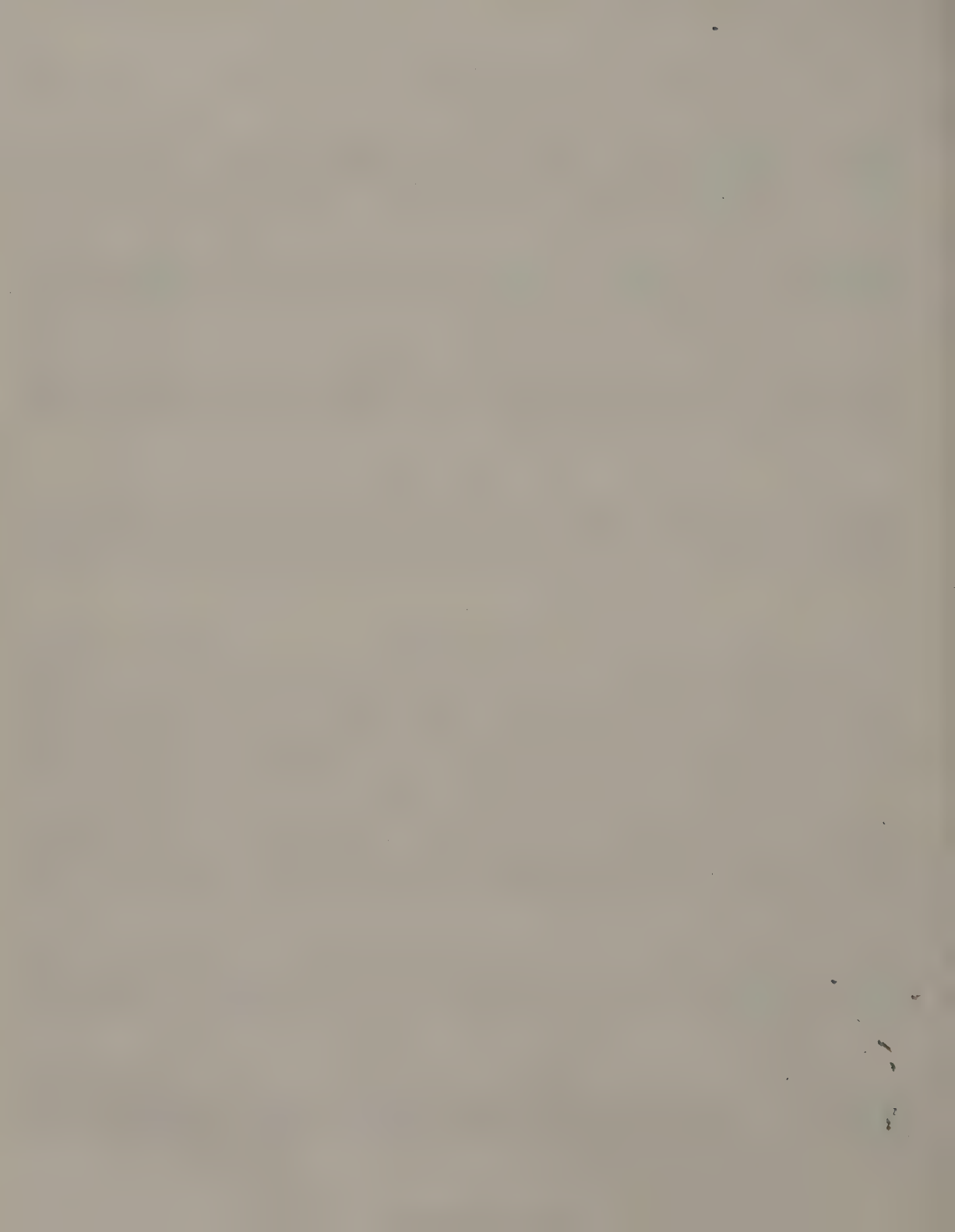
♩ = 94



A line drawing of a right hand with the index, middle, and ring fingers extended. To the right of the hand is a vertical tool, possibly a stylus or a probe, with a rectangular head and a thin shaft.

♩ = 112





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New England Fiddler's Repertoire

168 jigs, reels, hornpipes, and marches from the heart of New England: the core repertoire for contra dance musicians. Illustrated, with an introduction by Newt Tolman. 2nd Edition, 2003. Produced with assistance from the Gadd/Merrill Fund of the Country Dance and Song Society.

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375 jigs, reels, hornpipes, marches, and waltzes, including tunes composed by Liz Carroll, Angus Fitchet, Jerry Holland, Josephine Keegan, Ralph Page, Ed Reavey, John Taggart, and others. A collection of old & new fiddle tunes from New England, Ireland, Scotland, Cape Breton, and the Shetlands. 2004.

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Forty fiddle exercises to improve fingering and bowing by Randy Miller. Randy has used his teaching experience and more than thirty years of fiddling to create a series of exercises tailored to fiddlers and traditional fiddle music. Add nimbleness and fluidity to your playing! For all levels, novice through advanced. 28 pages, illustrated. 2007.

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